



It is believed that Amedeo Obici built this house around a c. 1870s farm house.

HISTORY ENDANGERED

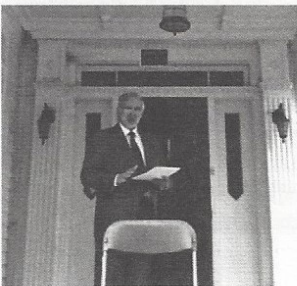
We were working on a newsletter on another topic but this needs attention now. On June 3, 2009, the City Council considered proposals for leasing Sleepy Hole Golf Course which was constructed years ago on what had been Amedeo Obici's Bay Point Farm. Council accepted a proposal for a long term lease of the golf course. The Obici House was not included in that proposal. Council turned down proposals that included refurbishing and using the house. At this writing the future of this National Register property hangs in the balance.

On May 18, 2009, Louis Malon, Director of Preservation Services from Preservation Virginia (formerly known as the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities) came to Suffolk to announce his organization's fifth annual list of the Most Endangered Historic Buildings and Sites in Virginia. The home of Amedeo Obici, founder of Planters Peanuts, was on the most endangered list.

How has it come to this?

Most people who have been in Suffolk a long time would understand Mr. Obici's part in our history. Perhaps this will inform newcomers or refresh memories.

Thanks to the family of the late Ted LoCascio, SNHS currently holds a wonderful collection of photographs and other items related to the Italian-born man who was such a giant of American industry. In this issue we share with our readers a glimpse of that collection.



Mr. LoCascio was an engineer who worked at Planters for and with Mr. Obici for 12 years and for many years after Mr. Obici's death. In his retirement he worked to insure that the story of Mr. Obici and Planters would be remembered. With some of the pictures Mr. LoCascio collected we share a story written by him telling some little known facts about Mr. Obici.

Louis Malon announced the Most Endangered Historic Buildings and Sites in Virginia from the porch of the Obici House. For the complete list of endangered properties, see page 3. Photo by John Johnson.

AMEDEO OBICI (The Other Man)

by
Ted S. LoCascio



Mr. and Mrs. Obici pose together

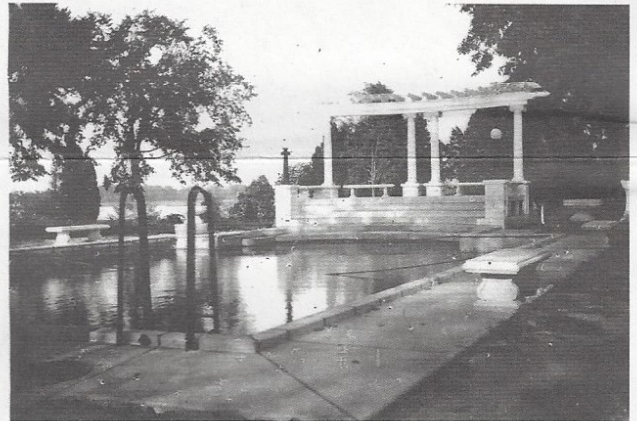
The story of Amedeo Obici, “The Industrial Giant”, “Founder of Planters Nut & Chocolate Company”, “The American Dream”, “From Rags to Riches”, has been told many times over. How about “Obici—The Other Man”?

Obici had other interests, personal and civic, which included the Suffolk Rotary Club (a founding member, director, and president), Suffolk Chamber of Commerce (president and director), Virginia Manufacturing Association (director and member of the Executive Committee), member of the Virginia State Chamber of Commerce and United States Chamber of Commerce. He was a director of the Farmers Bank of Nansemond, forerunner of the United Virginia Bank [now SunTrust]; he was active in many tasks that fall to the lot of successful people interested in the problems of city and state. He was amiable, with good-breeding and polite Latin ancestry—exceedingly generous toward worthy enterprises, sensibly philanthropic in the manner of people who respect money from having had to earn it in small amounts, but quick to recognize the merit and possibility of turning unfortunates into useful citizens.

Obici was a 32nd Degree Mason, and a member of the Shrine. He was Exalted Ruler of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. He was president of Christopher Columbus Society in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and was a member of the Loyal Order of the Moose. He was a member of the Board of Visitors of the College of William and Mary, at which he endowed a chair of Italian Literature. His religious affiliation was with the Freethinkers, and he was an Independent politically. During World War II he contributed his time and wealth and was responsible for raising one million dollars in war bonds. The decoration of Commander of the Crown of Italy was conferred upon Obici in recognition of Virginia’s most distinguished citizen of Italian birth. In 1935 President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s special guest list for the annual diplomatic reception at the White House included his friend, A. Obici. A large gift by A. Obici to establish a bed for tuberculosis patients in the Tidewater Victory Hospital was announced on March 17, 1938.

It was A. Obici who was first in Suffolk to reduce the fifty hour work week to forty hours, with employees receiving the same amount of compensation. This took place on May 22, 1933.

It was during the late 1920’s that Obici came to the rescue of the Suffolk News-Herald. The company was faced with having to “close its doors” when Obici purchased the paper from several local citizens who owned it. It was reported that Obici admittedly knew nothing concerning the operations of a newspaper, but he could not stand by and see the paper fold—leaving Suffolk without a hometown newspaper. He, therefore, purchased the paper to keep it alive until someone else could come forward and buy it. Obici first hired Claudis [Claudius] Riddick, a Suffolk native, to manage and publish the paper. Unfortunately, the paper lost money, and Obici had to subsidize the weekly payroll from his own funds. Eventually, the paper was sold to an individual in Beckley, West Virginia. He kept it until it was sold to Worrell newspaper chain. At the time it was sold, William (Bill) Missett became the editor and publisher.



The elegant pool was lost some years ago.



The Obicis extended hospitality to so many people, including the officers and crew of a French cruise ship who visited the Obici house in 1936.

It was also in the 1920’s that Obici and his friend Milton T. (Pete) Elliott decided that Suffolk needed a good hotel. They pooled resources and built the Elliott Hotel on the corner of Main and Market Streets (currently known as Suffolk Towers).

Likewise, Obici’s birthplace in Ordezo [Oderzo], Italy was provided with funds to build a hospital, just because the need existed.

Of all the philanthropic deeds attributed to Obici, the Louise Obici Memorial Hospital stands out most vividly among the people of Suffolk. Obici recognized the need of a modern hospital to care for the people of Suffolk and the surrounding communities. In 1942 he provided the initial funding to build the hospital as a fitting tribute to his late wife, Louise, and formed a corporation to hold funds from a variety of sources. At his death he bequeathed almost his entire fortune to the proposed hospital. It was Obici’s wish to provide medical care for every member of the community regardless of any individual’s ability to pay for needed services.



Mr. Obici with his pet goat



Obici leaves the house for the last time.

The Obici Mansion was built in 1924 by Amedeo Obici on the banks of the Nansemond River. It was known as Bay Point Farm and consisted of 300 acres.

All pictures from LoCascio collection unless otherwise noted

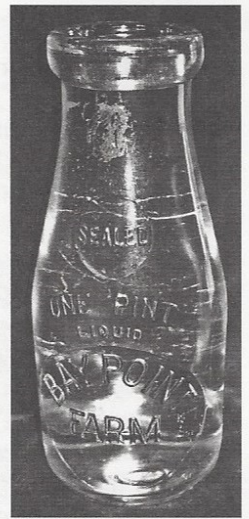
To learn more about Mr. and Mrs. Obici, Planters Peanuts and Bay Point Farm, read Strictly for Peanuts, published by SNHS and available at the Train Station gift shop.

In September 1951, the Louise [Obici] Memorial Hospital opened to the public and its companion School of Nursing opened in October.

In 1916 Obici married Louise, daughter of J.B. Muscante, who was from Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Louise was born in Meconesi, Italy. The Obicis built a beautiful 300 acre estate, Bay Point Farm, twelve miles below Suffolk on the Nansemond River. Mr. Obici had pardonable pride in this magnificent retreat with its comfortable home, facilities for boating and river sports, landscaped vistas, floral treasures, and a "bowling green" for the Italian game of Bocce. His special hobby was the modern dairy operated on the estate, from which milk products of pure Guernsey stock was delivered over a large route in Suffolk. The Obicis were lavish in their hospitality and lovers of refined music. Mr. Obici had a preference for the masters of literature, as indicated by the wealth of classic and semi-classic volumes in his library.

After Obici had built his home, in 1927 he felt the need to do something for his employees; he then built the Planters Club. The Club was not only used for the employees of Planters, but became a meeting place for various social activities for all the people of Suffolk.

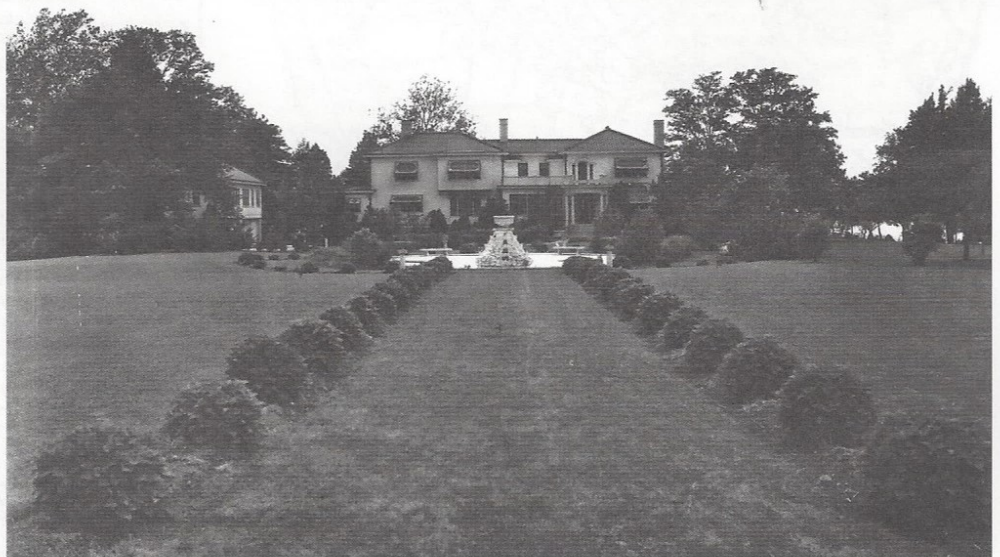
In the late 20th century the City of Portsmouth bought the farm and created a golf course around the house. The City of Suffolk has owned the property since 2002.



Bottle from Obici's dairy.
Photo by John Johnson



Mr. Obici and employees aboard his yacht
The Alura, 1936



Preservation Virginia's 2009 list of the Most Endangered Historic Buildings and Sites in Virginia:

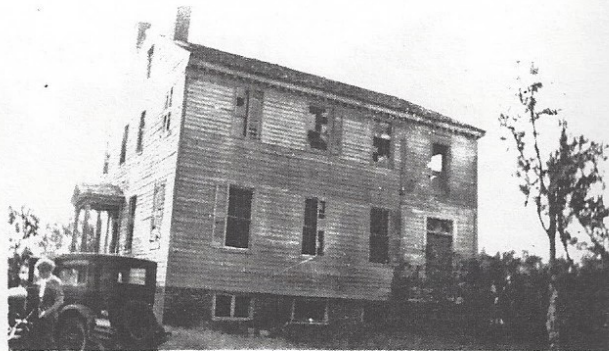
- The Obici House in Suffolk
- The Wilderness Battlefield in Orange County
- Former Colonial Heights Baptist Church
- Wolftrap in Isle of Wight County
- Selma in Loudoun County
- McIntire Park in Charlottesville
- Historic barns in Pittsylvania County
- Konnarock School in Troutdale
- 1908 Marion Schoolhouse in Smyth County (Listed in no particular order)

History Lost

Proximity to the river was desirable from earliest times because it facilitated trade and travel. This house and its land appear to be adjacent to the land that became Amedeo Obici's Bay Point Farm. One of our members, Henry A. Rawles, Jr., of Columbus, Ohio, shared this information with us. Sometime after these photos were taken, the house burned down. Henry's mother recorded the following about the house:

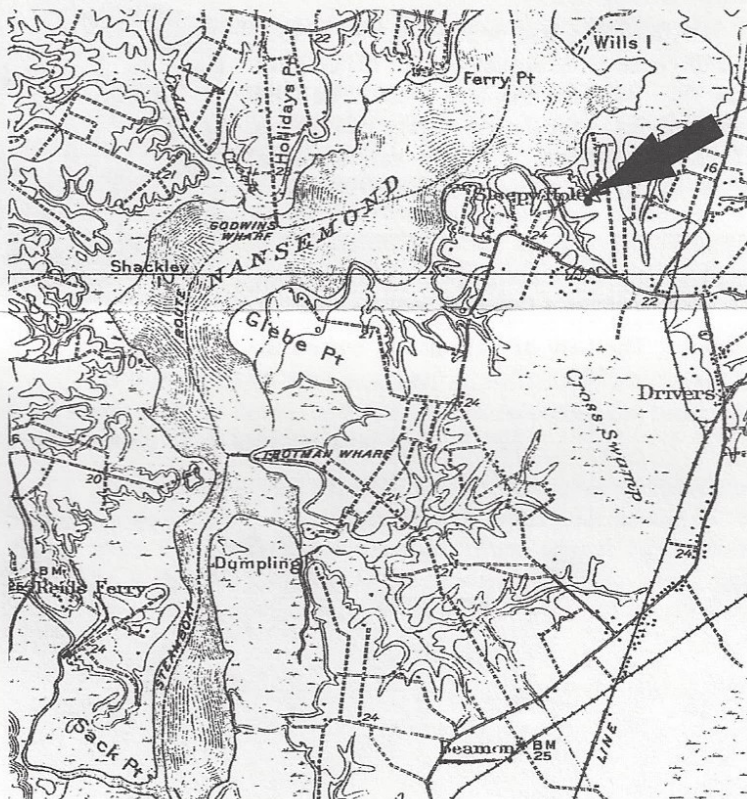
"From newspaper article (Suffolk-Herald) under date of Feb. 8, 1934, written by Mrs. Brockenborough of Suffolk—From Mintonville (home of the Mintons and Shepherds) straight back into the country on the river bank is a gorgeous old house, white clapboards of a most generous proportion, and with the prettiest window I ever saw. This place is called the Bidgood House, but really was the home of Solomon Shepherd, a Revolutionary soldier. He outlived his loved ones and grieved for them so much he lost his mind and spent most of his latter days pacing the floor, dressed in full uniform, with bayonet striking the floor—thinking he was still fighting the British.

Note: When I first saw this old house (in 1934) it was in bad condition. It has since burned. The land on which it was located belonged to a Miss Bidgood later." (signed - Brownie Rawles)



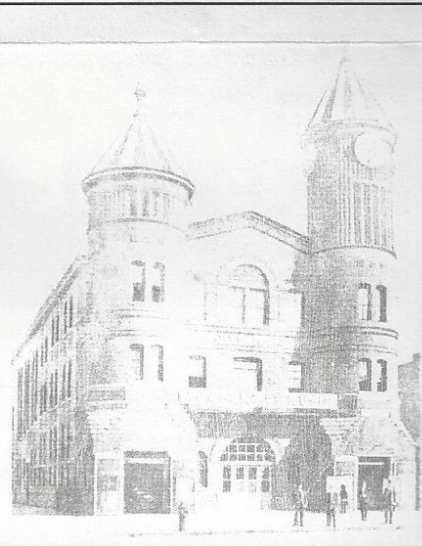
c. 1934 views of the Shepherd/Bidgood house

The arrow indicates the former location of the Shepherd house. The land appears to be adjacent to the later Bay Point Farm/Sleepy Hole Golf Course. The map is undated but shows the steamboat route from wharf to wharf. Driver (or Drivers Station) is shown here center right on the map.



*Those who cannot
remember the past
are condemned to
repeat it.*

George Santayana



Hiking to Conan Beach

Good Old Summertime

Edith Freeman Seiling worked at Lakeview Hospital in the 1940s and lived in the nurse's dormitory. She enjoyed spending summer afternoons at Conan Beach. For new folks Conan Beach was beside Pitchkettle Road near Murphy's Mill Road before Lake Meade was created. Photos thanks to Edith Seiling



A refreshing dip

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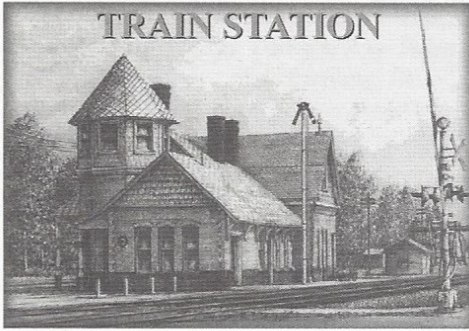
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News from the Train Station



Suffolk's Most Recognizable Landmark
Phone: 757-923-4750 Email: trainstation@exis.net
Kristina Prudencio, Train Station Assistant

Special Summer Hours at the Train Station

Thursday & Friday - 10:00 am - 4:00 pm
Saturday - 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
Sunday - 1:00 - 4:00 pm

New Train Station Committee

The SNHS Board of Directors recently appointed a new Train Station Committee. We are happy to have Tim and Marie Bentley back on board, along with old timers Karen Grogan, Karen Hughes, Bob Tompert and Barbara McPhail.

The committee had its first meeting on June 1 to begin work on plans and ideas for the Station and welcomes your comments and concerns.

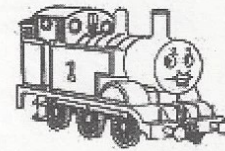
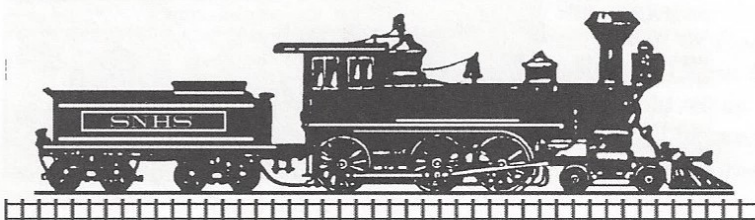
The committee will host a gathering in the near future to thank all volunteers for their continued support. If you have a friend who might enjoy volunteering, let us know. See phone number and email address above.

Thank You

Thanks to the Tourism Department of the City of Suffolk for providing the Train Station with three interns who are volunteering at the Station and earning credit toward their college degrees. Robert Hill and Shayra Tolliver are students at Norfolk State University and Sarah Daniel is a student at Virginia Tech.

It is wonderful to have these students during the summer when many regular volunteers are on vacation.

Joyner Park, adjacent to the N&W station at the east end of Bank Street, was the scene of weekend band concerts and other pleasant summer outings. Archa Pharis (extreme right, 1st row) played the cornet with the Community Service Band. Lady is at his feet.



Thomas Play Day at the Station

August 22, 2009

10:00 am - 2:00 pm

We will have Thomas movies for the kids to enjoy as well as story time and a coloring contest. Snacks will be provided.

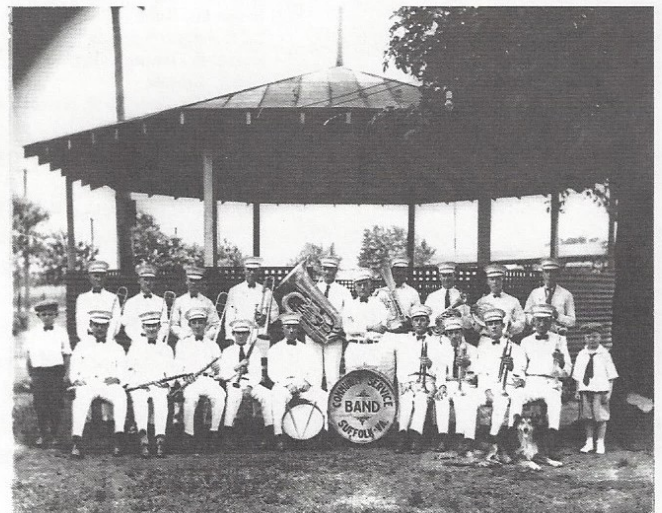
20% off all children's toys and books that day

Special Door prize for all who attend

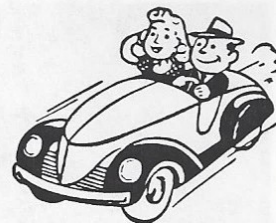
Register to win a family four pack of tickets for a "Day Out with Thomas" in Spencer, NC on September 25-27



William Archa Pharis came from Martinsville, VA, and worked for Norfolk & Western RR for 50 years. Here he is shown in 1931 at the N&W station loading boxes of Planters Peanuts being sent to Italy by Mr. Obici. The box Mr. Pharis is holding was for Benito Mussolini. Though Mr. Obici always kept an eye to his homeland, he actively supported his adopted land once we entered the war.



Road Trip



To: Halifax County, N.C.
 Date: Saturday, August 8
 Departure: 7:30 a.m. from the Train Station
 Return: Late afternoon
 Cost: SNHS members - \$10, plus meals
 Nonmembers - \$15, plus meals

The Roanoke River is born in Virginia and flows into North Carolina, ultimately to the Albemarle Sound. In the eighteenth century farmers who lived along the upper Roanoke River above the fall line had great difficulty getting products to market, especially to the port at Norfolk.

Around 1800 a canal was built to bypass the rapids. Bateaux were used to transport goods on the canal to the lower part of the river below the falls where steamboats and barges could pick up the goods and take them to Norfolk. The huge river flooded frequently and the canal locks needed constant repairs.



Emblem of Roanoke Canal Museum and Trail

Then came the railroad and it changed everything. The Portsmouth and Roanoke Railroad came through Suffolk in 1834—our first railroad—and made its way to the Roanoke River to answer the need of the farmers in that area. This eventually became the Seaboard Railroad—now CSX.

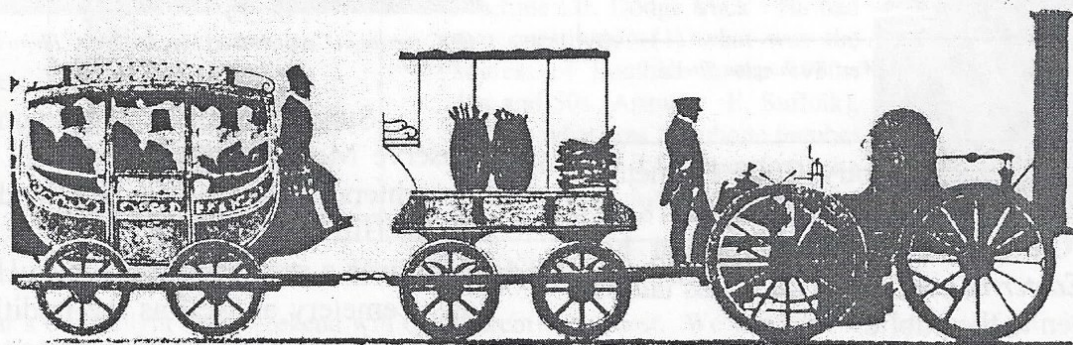
On Saturday, August 8, we'll follow the Seaboard RR to Seaboard, N.C., and have breakfast at the Broadnax Diner, a tiny place featured in *Interstate Eateries*. (Seaboard was, for many years, the home of the writer Bernice Kelly Harris.)

After breakfast, we will follow the railroad across the Roanoke River into Halifax County. Here we'll see some of Historic Halifax, an early port on the Roanoke River. We'll visit the Roanoke Canal Museum in Roanoke Rapids and its locks. We'll have lunch at Ralph's, famous for its barbeque and its great buffet. In Weldon we can visit an old hardware store and Riverside Mill, an old cotton mill that has recently become an art gallery and antiques mall.

Note: Roanoke Rapids was the home of Norma Rae. The town was named by Archie Chanler, (an Astor heir and husband of Virginia writer Amelie Rives) who owned a mill there on the river.

We'll plan to be back late afternoon.

FOR RESERVATIONS: Call the Dawson House, 539-2781. Space is limited.



from Railways



We are very grateful to the Rotary Club for their recent second gift to the Dawson House project. Here Rotary member (and SNHS Vice President) Lynette White presents a check to SNHS President Becky Habel on the porch of the Dawson House. Photo thanks to Lynette White



Victory Parade

COMPANY F - 29th DIVISION

July 4, 1919



Marching on the Square (100 block of West Washington Street)

At the North Suffolk Library, 2000 Bennett's Creek Park Road, on Tuesday, August 18, at 6:00 pm, Chris Dickon will talk about his book *The Eastern Shore Railroad*. This talk is free and open to the public.

Additional Gifts and Memorials

To the Train Station:

- In memory of Eric Brooks from *Glenn & Karen Hughes*

To the Dawson House:

- from *Suffolk Rotary Club*

Correction:

- In honor of Judith W. Godwin from *Curtis & Martha Saunders*

To Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society:

- In honor of Susan Garrett from *Anonymous*

Thanks to those of you who called to check on us at the Dawson House following the terrible Franklin Street fire. Also, thanks to our members and friends in the community who helped us help our neighbors. These families lost all their earthly possessions and are so grateful for any and all help. Thank goodness no lives were lost.



UDC service at Cedar Hill on May 29, 2009. Photo thanks to Jimmy Crocker

Suffolk residents had a number ways to observe Memorial Day this year. The United Daughters of the Confederacy held a service in Cedar Hill Cemetery on Saturday. On Monday there was a service at the Albert Horton Veterans Cemetery as well as the traditional American Legion service at the entrance to Cedar Hill.

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- Miley & Jean Walker
In Honor of Sue Woodward from
- Hon. John R. Jordan, Jr.

To the Dawson House:

- In memory of Emily R. Wheary from
- Nita Bagnell
- Mary Lawrence Harrell
- Glenn & Karen Hughes
- Joyce Trump
- Tom & Sue Woodward
- Hubert & Christine Young

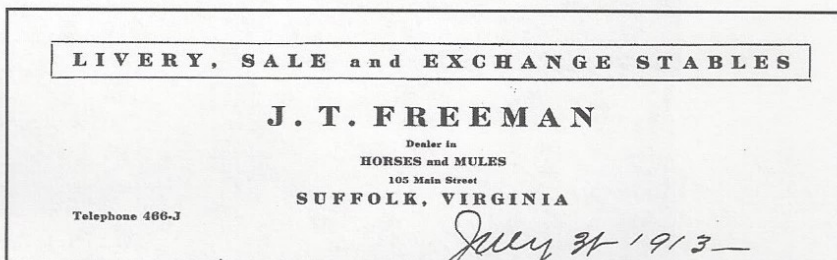
To the Train Station:

- In memory of Jeanne Becker from
- Glenn & Karen Hughes

SNHS Board

Rebecca Habel, President	Members at Large:
Lynette White, Vice President	Robert Baker
Monica Eure, Secretary	Karen Hughes
Michael Council, Treasurer	Hunter Odom
Robert Tompert, Asst. Treas.	Nita Bagnell/Mary
Kermit Hobbs, Historian	Lawrence Harrell

P.S. to our September 2008 Let's Go to the Fair issue:



Letterhead thanks to Edith Seiling

The Dawson House



A Home for Local History

Phone: 757-539-2781—email: snhs@verizon.net
www.suffolkhistory.org
Julie Johnson, Administrative Assistant

From the Dawson House

- Twenty-four volunteers gave a total of more than 100 hours total in April, May and June at the Dawson House doing yard work, helping prepare for or working at our Heirloom Sale, preparing mailings, opening the house for part of Garden Tour day, and working on our collections, among many other bits and pieces of business.
- In April, May and June the office fielded nearly 40 requests for information or pictures. We're not always able to help but frequently we can. Among the most interesting was a request from Idaho for pictures of twenty-three gravestones in Cedar Hill. (We were happy to tell her that one person whose gravestone photo she requested is still alive.)
- Another interesting request was from new member John Heimerl who was restoring a 1934 Benthall Machine Co. Dodge truck. He had two questions: (1) what was the address of Benthall in the 1930s, 40s and 50s (Answer: E. Suffolk), and (2) what was the phone number (Answer: 2). (Answers from the 1949 phone book.)



P.S. to our June 2008 issue **The Pause That Refreshes:**

From the 1949 Suffolk telephone directory




CLICQUOT CLUB
BEVERAGES
Fifty Years
THE Favorite
PHONE SUFFOLK **1658**
CLICQUOT CLUB
BOTTLING CO., Inc.
517 SOUTH MAIN ST.

Candlelight Tour—2009

This year's Candlelight Tour weekend will be different from most. We will feature a variety of activities at the Dawson House. Some readers might remember other years when we featured one place—i.e. Riddick's Folly. As always, it will be the first weekend in December. Look forward to the immensely popular Sugar Plum Kitchen and the Great Greens Sale again this year. More information coming in our next issue.



Have a wonderful summer! Maybe yours will include some al fresco celebrations such as this birthday party at the W.B. Allen home on Riverview Drive in the 1930s. No doubt a number of our members were in attendance. If you find your face in the photo, we'd love to hear from you.

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND  HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P. O. Box 1255
Suffolk, Virginia 23439-1255

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*Amedeo Obici riding with a young friend
on the river side of the house*